

AS THE TWIG IS BENT

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WITH A DRAWING BY THE KINNEYS

ANTONIA FORESTER, being a highly intelligent girl, made no visible objection to the liberal-handed largesse of information about herself with which her great-aunt gratified the curiosity of Manchester people. It is possible that she thought it one of the necessary disadvantages traditionally connected with being taken up by rich and eccentric old relatives. It is probable that she put extreme publicity about her past among the penalties she was to pay for the undeniably golden opportunities of her present. Another possibility—always to be taken into account with Antonia—is that, being as startlingly frank as she was handsome and intelligent, she might have told it all herself if old Mrs. Maythew had not forestalled her.

However that may be, she opposed, at any rate, nothing but her singularly fresh and brilliant smile to her great-aunt's description of the life she had left.

"I can't say," Mrs. Maythew remarked, "as impresarios are always saying about *their* famous 'finds,' that I picked her up out of the gutter, for nothing could be more unlike a gutter than her stepfather's revoltingly respectable village home. Indeed, if I had to choose, I should take the gutter, as affording more chance of entertaining company. Think of it! Antonia is twenty-one, with her looks, and she had been brought up on Emerson! More than that, for five years she had taught scales to stupid little country brats! More than that, she had never worn silk stockings, nor been kissed, nor seen a divorced person, nor eaten lobster, nor met a man whose income was over two thousand, nor tasted wine, nor been to the theater!"

From the table where she was pouring

iced drinks for the men just up from the golf-course, Antonia laughed, and called across the room:

"But, Aunt Burke, I've read a lot more than Emerson! There's a big library in the college town where I went to give music-lessons, so I've met in books everything improper and sophisticated, even if I've been deprived of seeing it in the flesh. Oh, I'm a very learned person!" Still laughing, she turned back to her attendants, and told them: "As for my not having eaten lobsters or rich young men, think how that has sharpened my teeth!"

They laughed, delighted with her dramatic suggestion of their danger, and one of them said:

"What is Emerson all about, anyhow? One's always hearing the name, in college and 'round."

"Emerson is a liar, that's what he is!" Miss Forester answered promptly. "He is a man who takes a great many volumes to tell you that what you *are* is of more importance than what you *have*. What you have!" She swept a gesture like a richly explanatory foot-note over her own elaborate costume, over the luxurious room, the costly toilets of the other women, and the crowd of well-fed, well-dressed young men before her. "As long as you haven't got anything, you can read Emerson; but, once you have tasted blood—" She brought her strong white teeth together with a click.

Her listeners pressed a little nearer as they laughed at this sally. They seemed almost visibly drawn by some emanation from the beautiful newcomer. Her great-aunt, glancing over at the compact rampart of masculine backs about the punch-table, and hearing another great laugh at some speech of her niece's, recognized it as the



ANTONIA KEPT HER NEW CAPTIVE TIED CLOSELY TO HER CHARIOT-WHEELS

emanation of success. She nodded her elaborately dressed head, and remarked to her nearest neighbor, who happened to be the bishop of a Western diocese:

"She'll do. She'll go far. She'll be loaning me money yet!"

The bishop demurred.

"She looks too unconscious and unspoiled a nature to be mercenary."

Mrs. Maythew laughed.

"There's not an unconscious hair in that fine black coiffure," she assured him. "Antonia's a girl after my own heart. She means to get on. And she will." She turned on the elderly ecclesiastic sharply. "And she should. It is not mercenary for a girl with her looks and temperament to marry for money. She has a real *grande passion* for the things money buys. She takes to them as a sponge expands in water. I shall never forget her face as she tried on my sable cloak. It was like seeing a soul in paradise!"

The bishop frowned and stood up.

"I've shocked you," said the old lady, well pleased. "You should come to see me oftener. But before you perform your departing dust-shaking you may be interested to know that the soul in paradise cried out, with a fervor which shook her voice—and that's usually as cool and firm as the rest of her: 'Oh, it seems to me that I would be willing to marry a chimpanzee to wear such things all the time!'"

"I really must go," said the bishop, and went.

But, as he continued to stay on in Manchester, he could not escape the sight of Antonia's brilliant career. Nor could he escape hearing of it. Before they began on the *post-mortems* of the day's bridge, the women made sure that they had missed none of the details of her campaign. The men repeated and laughed at her audacious sayings and doings before wrangling over the day's golf. At all places and at all times in the life of the summer colony she was a conspicuous object, even when her high-colored and exquisitely adorned beauty was not visible. If she was present, every one looked at her. If she was not, they talked about her.

"She is a perfect specimen of the successful American girl," Mrs. Maythew told the bishop at a musicale. "If she'd been a man, she'd have used her brains to make millions. As it is, she uses them to aid her good looks and marry millions."

"It is painful to think what she represents in materialism," protested the bishop.

"It is delicious to think what she represents in clear, honest use of gray matter," cried the old woman. "She knows what she wants, and goes after it; and when she gets it, she'll like it. There'd be fewer divorces in our set if the rest of the women would leave their muddle-headed, sentimental compromises and do likewise."

"What a singular home education she must have had!" mused the bishop.

"You speak the truth. Her stepfather is a Unitarian minister, who brought her up on Emerson, oatmeal, and scratchy underwear. It's been a fine spring-board of reaction for Antonia to jump from."

"Emerson is rather ascetic diet for the young," said the bishop. "If she had been brought up in the church, now—"

At this Mrs. Maythew laughed.

"You couldn't convert her, my dear bishop, any more than you could convert a starving young lioness from a spring lamb by sprinkling her with holy water. And you'd commit a sin against nature if you did. Any creature who loves and enjoys the good things of this life with Antonia's lyric passion—"

"But how about the spring lamb?" asked the bishop, looking across at Antonia, who was stripping the gloves from her long, white arms, showing her teeth in a smile, and moving toward the piano.

Mrs. Maythew looked at him sharply.

"Why, to be sure!" she cried, much amused. "I'd forgotten all about Percy!"

The bishop frowned.

"My nephew can have nothing to do with my opinion of Miss Forester. He is not, thank Heaven, a rich young man, but a young man fortuitously rich. It is only a year ago, you know, that he inherited that fortune."

"Ah, I don't doubt Percy is as much a professor of botany as ever he was," admitted Mrs. Maythew. "He's not a volatile creature, to do him justice. But his fortune exists, none the less. I must warn Antonia not to take any definite action till he appears on the scene."

"I doubt if Miss Forester would appeal very much to him," said the bishop, with an apparent calm which was contradicted by the evident relief in his voice as he went on. "And as he is not coming here this summer, but is to motor through Norway, botanizing—"

"Ah, well," said the old lady, "that settles it, of course. Antonia will have to choose from what she has here, then. It's too bad! Percy is not exciting company; but a young man with his interest in natural science, his self-effacing personality, and his money was certainly intended by Providence to have his millions spent by an Antonia!"

The first of that young lady's firm and massive chords drowned out the bishop's answer. Apparently it was a protest against having Providence dragged into the affairs of such a person.

II

THAT some power was acting in the matter, either Providence or one of Providence's enemies, seemed evident to every one when Antonia returned from a casual motor-trip with the Bryces, bringing along—to all appearances a most willing victim—a rather heavily built, square-shouldered young man with a serious, honest face and ruminative eyes, who turned to the astonished and chaffing welcome of his friends in Manchester a tranquil front of silent composure.

"We saw him in the dining-room of the Woodstock Inn," Antonia explained, her own composure never being of the silent variety. "Mrs. Bryce said: 'Why, there's the bishop's nephew! I thought he was in Norway.' And I said: 'Oh, Mr. Bryce, do make him come over here to our table. I love the bishop so!'" She broke off to bestow on that dignitary her loveliest smile, and to assure him: "It was really you who brought us together, you see, for I knew your nephew must be worth while; and so he did—Mr. Bryce, I mean—and Percy"—the bishop smiled unhilariously. She was calling him Percy already!—"Percy turned out to be collecting some shells, or bugs, or leaves, or something, that you can't find anywhere but in Woodstock, only that sounds like a pretty tall story to me. He was going to sail from New York the next morning, but we had a vacant place in the car and we brought him right along. We told him he really ought to see his uncle before he went so far away."

The bishop felt that the young lioness, before beginning on her foreordained meal, was honoring him with a stroke or two from her powerful talons. Later that evening he told Mrs. Maythew, with an outraged protest:

"But, see here, Percy is the best fellow in the world. Call Miss Forester off. There are plenty of others who would do as well for her. It's only accidentally that he is a rich man. I don't know a straighter, cleaner, finer soul than Percy. He is like a son to me."

His interlocutor grinned.

"Discipline is good for souls," she said.

"Antonia is like a daughter to me."

"I shall warn Percy," he told her with heated brevity.

"Pray do!" said the old lady, who seemed to find the idea amusing.

Antonia kept her new captive tied so closely to her chariot-wheels that ten days passed before the bishop found a suitable occasion to sound his warning. However, he was consoled for this delay by the dramatic effectiveness of the occasion when it presented itself. They were at a garden-party; and Antonia, in the midst of her usual crowd of admirers, had just been celebrating—with her usual frankness—the beauties of her toilet. She was, indeed, a triumphal vision.

"I would sell my soul to own this dress instead of renting it, so to speak, from Aunt Burke! The skirt has fifty-three of those tiny hand-made tucks on each breadth—I know. I counted them!" she cried, her eyes shining like stars. "And the lace on the scarf is real—all of it—those million yards! And the mull it's made of is so fine that angels couldn't dream of anything finer, even after a fête-day in heaven!"

At this bold comparison she had caught the bishop's eye on her, and had swept him a curtsy—a flexible, supple movement that set off her beauty like the sudden breaking out of a musical accompaniment to a fine poem.

"Remember the pit from which I was dugged, bishop!" she had called to him. "A pit filled with calicoes, and unbleached cotton, and coarse torchon lace, and other devices of the enemy of mankind!" With which she had turned away, trailing her ruffles over the grass in an ecstasy of carelessness.

The bishop looked solemnly at his nephew.

"She does not hide her character," he said.

The young man proved to have several ideas on the subject, all of them ready for presentation.

"Ah, she is only twenty-one, and this is her first taste of luxury. It is also possible that her vocabulary is more vigorous than her real ideas. Remember, she was brought up on Emerson. There's sure to be a reaction from that, but there's also pretty sure to be some lasting effect."

The bishop was so stirred by this evidence of the thought bestowed by his nephew on Miss Forester that he cried out warmly:

"In all the world there is not a more utterly materialistic creature!"

"Not knowing all the others, I can't say about that," murmured his nephew.

"She makes me shudder," said the bishop.

The young man looked after her, and said nothing; but his expression was such that the bishop cast caution from him with a passionate gesture, and declared, in a voice which suited the gesture:

"She would marry any one—*any one*—for money. She says so herself."

His nephew was silent for a moment, apparently pondering his response to this thrust. Finally he said mildly, beginning to move away:

"I should be very glad to have her willing to marry me for any reason at all."

After such openness of speech, the bishop did not see his way clear, a fortnight later, to congratulate his nephew on the announcement of his engagement to the reigning beauty. He kept his own counsel—which, judging from the expression of his face, was a somewhat bitter possession.

Mrs. Maythrew did not wait for his felicitation, but at the first opportunity congratulated herself to his face with her usual aplomb.

"Didn't I tell you that Antonia is under a lucky star? Her success is perfect. She has the richest *parti* in four States, and a man she respects and likes into the bargain! Really, if it were not Antonia, I should go farther and say—what is the truth—that she's head over ears in love with him."

The bishop raised his eyebrows.

To this silent comment the old lady returned frankly:

"Oh, well, of course, if he hadn't had money, she'd never have looked at him. But now she *has* looked at him—"

"Her conversation on the subject proves your point," said the bishop with a melancholy irony.

Indeed, as he intimated, Antonia's enthusiasm over her future was remarkably like her enthusiasm over her present. Her delight in her prospective wealth was outspoken to the last degree.

"Why, Aunt Burke is a beggar-woman compared to me!" she declared in that lady's presence. "I've been a simpleton to be so impressed by this ratty little summer cottage of hers, and that out-of-date old house on Fifty-Third Street. Percy says I may build a copy of one of the Venetian palaces overlooking Central Park. But before I bother with that I must see the Venetian palaces, and Cairo, and Paris, and Hong-Kong, and St. Petersburg, and London, and the Himalayas, and Rome! If I was hungry before, I'm famished now—mad, ravening to begin on all that I have missed and am going to have, to have, to have! We're going to motor as long as there's land, and when we get to jumping-off places there'll be our yacht. Percy's sent to New York to buy the Larues' yacht, the one they went to Japan on; and oh, oh, my wedding-dress!"

She screwed up her eyes and shook both shapely hands in the air, to express her despair at the poverty-stricken condition of the English language.

The bishop glanced across at his nephew, sitting as usual in a contemplative silence, to see how he would take this summing-up of the advantages of a marriage with him. He surprised in the eyes of the prospective bridegroom a brooding, indulgent passion of tenderness which gave him a qualm of something very much like nausea.

"I am glad his mother is not alive to see his wedding-day," thought the older man savagely.

This was an event which hourly assumed more importance. It was to take place at St. Bartholomew's, the decorations were to be of pink orchids, there was to be an attendant band of twelve bridesmaids, the wedding-dress was to be solid *point d'Angleterre*, the reception afterward—

"Oh, *damn* that California cousin who left him the money!" cried the bishop to himself.

And yet, a fortnight before they were all to move down to the city and begin preparations for the great day, when the bishop opened a letter from San Francisco, he turned very white at the contents, and could not put the heavy white sheet back into the envelope because his old hands

trembled so. He sat very still for a long time, and his color did not come back as he pondered.

III

THAT afternoon he sought out his nephew's *fiancée*, and requested a few moments' uninterrupted conversation with her. He tried to make his tone casual, and to present his usual front of episcopal dignity; but that he failed was proved by Miss Forester's precipitately dropping her plans for the afternoon, and betaking herself, with her visitor, to the summer-house, where they could be quite alone.

There she faced him with a countenance of pale intensity.

"What dreadful thing has happened?" she asked. "Quick! Quick! I haven't seen Percy since yesterday. He was going out on a horse—"

The bishop shook his head.

"My nephew is in his usual excellent health," he assured her; "but there is bad news which will prove an obstacle to your marriage with him."

The girl turned whiter, though she still stood in a pose so self-assured as to be defiant.

"What possible obstacle to our marriage can there be?" she demanded. As the bishop hesitated, she went on steadily: "I am not the woman to believe evil of my future husband from any one but himself. If it is some old gossiping tale that you have to—"

The bishop almost smiled.

"No, no; Percy has a past as spotless as a girl's. It is quite simply that in the future he will have no money—none at all but what he can earn by going back to his old profession of botany."

The girl looked bewildered and utterly uncomprehending.

"No money?" she asked. "Percy with no money? Why, how does—"

"Simplicity itself," said the bishop. "Another heir has been found for the California estate—a sailor, who turned up unexpectedly, and who proves to be the missing son."

Miss Forester stared at her informant a long time with a face very white and perfectly devoid of any expression.

"Did Percy ask you to come and break off our engagement?" he presently made out that she was asking him, although her voice was almost inaudible.

"No—oh, no! Percy knows nothing about it as yet. I heard through a confidential source—a lawyer who is a friend of the family, and who wished me to break it gently to Percy."

He could see nothing in this speech, more than in any of his others, to account for the storm of sobbing which now suddenly bowed the girl's head in her hands. He accounted for her outburst of grief, therefore, on the theory that she had but just been able to take in the full meaning of her disappointment.

"It is naturally a very great blow to your expectations," he went on, anxious to conciliate her; "although we must all, of course, be very thankful that it came before it was too late. I hope you will remember that it will also be a very great loss to Percy. I wished to tell you at once, so that you could recover from the shock before the news arrives publicly—which can't be more than a couple of days from now—and to beg you to be as gentle as possible with the poor boy. Perhaps you will wait a little while before—or no, probably that would make it no easier in the end; but be gentle—"

Miss Forester raised her head, showing a face swollen and red. The bishop reflected that she was as ungovernably frank with her tears as in other matters. They looked at each other for a long time in a perfect silence. The girl was not crying now, though her face was very grave.

As the silence continued, the bishop wondered more and more what she was thinking about. After a time he began to be uneasily suspicious that she was thinking about him. This seemed so strange a subject, however, for a young woman in her situation that he refused to take at its face value the level, scrutinizing stare with which she surveyed him. And, indeed, when she spoke it was to express a sentiment more in accord with the considerations which he must suppose to be filling her mind.

"The woman who marries Percy now," she said musingly, "marries, therefore, a poor professor of botany."

"Exactly," said his uncle.

"He will earn about two thousand a year?" asked the girl.

"Perhaps even less than that, to begin with," said the bishop.

"I know what that means in a college town," said Miss Forester. "His wife will do her own work, wash dishes"—she looked

reflectively at her very white hands—"make her own dresses, and stay in town during vacations, because there will be no money for traveling."

"The cost of living is high," admitted the bishop, without an effort.

There was another long silence between them. Then Miss Forester, for the first time, sat down.

"Would you mind going away now," she asked, "and leaving me alone? There are a great many things I must think over." As the elderly ecclesiastic opened his mouth to speak, she made a gesture which was meant, the bishop perceived, to be reassuring. "Yes, yes, I will be gentle to Percy—as gentle, that is, as circumstances permit."

She smiled a little as she finished this somewhat ambiguous phrase, and the bishop went away shivering.

He was not reassured by Antonia's bearing when he next saw her—that evening, at a dance in the clubhouse. She was brilliant almost to the blinding-point in white lace and scarlet chiffon, and she was leading about, like a tame bear, a heavy-eyed Wall Street magnate who had met her for the first time a week before, and whose admiration of her had since been proclaimed at every hour of the day, to any one who would listen. Percy was detained, and would not arrive until late. Mrs. Maythew strongly disapproved of his tardiness.

"If he thinks that Antonia is a girl who can be ticketed, 'spoken for,' and then left safely to dangle before the eyes of other men—" she cried elliptically. "This railroad individual is mad about her—he makes no secret of it. Percy may come strolling in at midnight to find her engaged to some one else!"

The bishop thought it not at all improbable. He felt very melancholy and embittered, and betook himself out to a cigar on the long, vine-covered porch.

After a time his gloomy solitude was broken in upon by voices. Swathed in a glittering oriental scarf, and leading her new captive "by the nose," as the sardonic old gentleman who observed her remarked to himself, Antonia and the portly broker passed by to a remote and dimly lighted corner. They were out of ear-shot, though he could hear the constant murmur of their voices. He gathered from the sound, and from what he could see of their attitudes, that the man was addressing a long and im-

passioned speech to her, which Antonia interrupted only occasionally by a word or gesture.

Even at that distance he could see that her eyes were extraordinarily large and brilliant. She looked as tense and excited as the bishop felt himself to be.

A motor-car slid silently under the lights of the porte-cochère at the other end of the porch, and stopped. The bishop saw a gentleman in evening dress emerge from the tonneau and stand for a moment under the brilliant electric lights. They showed him to have a serious, honest face, the sight of which gave the bishop the sensation of being awakened from a nightmare to the most comforting of daylight scenes.

He turned instinctively to see if the couple beyond him had also noticed the arrival. He caught only a flutter of scarlet and white as Antonia flashed by him—Antonia, bounding, long-limbed, like a panther down the porch, her skirts caught high, her glittering scarf dragging behind her.

"What deviltry is she up to now?" thought the old gentleman, startled and apprehensive.

Leaning forward, he could see that she had had time for but the briefest monosyllabic colloquy with her *fiancé* before the door to the ballroom opened, and a crowd of dancers poured out upon the porch at the end of a dance. For a time they hid the two from the bishop's anxious eye, and he was reduced to conjecturing from the laughter and loud, ejaculatory talk that they were finding Antonia even more entertaining than usual.

"She is capable," he thought despairingly, "of taking this occasion for announcing Percy's loss and her engagement to the broker!"

Suddenly, from out the laughing uproar around the two, Antonia's voice arose. She was shouting:

"Uncle Bishop! Uncle Bishop! You're needed!"

One of the young men came running back toward him, grinning widely.

"She's a corker!" he cried. "By Jove! You never know what she means, or what she'll be up to next!"

"What is she doing now?" asked the bishop, rising and moving toward the crowd. "And what can she want of me?"

"Lord knows!" his young attendant answered to both these questions. "She told me to go and get you. She's giving away all

her things to the girls, and laughing like mad about how furious her aunt'll be!"

When the bishop arrived, Antonia, stripped of her rings and bracelets and fan, the gold bandeau gone from her black hair, the pearls from her dazzling neck, had just discovered her scarf clinging about her feet.

"Here, Lolly, here's a keepsake for you, if you *did* get here late! I'd give you my dress if it weren't for the looks of the thing!"

"What are you up to?" asked the girl who had just joined the group.

Antonia snatched the long, black overcoat from her *fiancé's* arm, and extinguished in its severe masculine lines the red and white of her costume.

"I'm taking the veil!" she said. "Percy, give me a handkerchief to tie over my hair!" Seeing the bishop's haggard old face over the heads of those about her, she went on: "We are going to take the bishop in the car, Percy and I, and dash over the State-line, where you don't have to have a license. We're going to get married! The dear bishop, who loves me so warmly, is going to marry us!" She laughed at the spectacle of stupefaction presented to her

by her uncle-to-be. "We have a secret between us, my Uncle Bishop and I. He knows that I won't need in my future life any of the vain gauds I've been showering on you!"

She seized her *fiancé's* hand, and his uncle's, and ran down the porch, dragging both men after her, and shouting over her shoulder to the burst of talk which followed them:

"No, you *don't* all come after us in motor-cars to celebrate! I'll stand on the back seat and pick you off one by one with Percy's revolver if you try to! I've changed my mind, and I'm going to have a marriage instead of a wedding!"

Somehow she bundled them into the tonneau of the waiting car, and banged the door in the flushed and laughing faces of their pursuers. Then she stood up, very tall in her somber, shapeless garment.

"Listen, listen all of you"—she motioned gaily for silence—"to my last word and testament! I want to save you from my horrible fate. If you have any Emerson in your houses, go home and burn him! If you are once inoculated with him, there is no cure! Your case is hopeless!"
